Building curation into records creation:
Developing a digital repository program at the American Institute of Architects
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Successful digital curation begins at the point of creation. How can a small archive achieve this for permanent born-digital records produced by its own organization?

The issue
The archivist doesn’t have time to assess, arrange, and describe masses of unidentified files. Creators don’t have time to assess and tag each piece.

In order to get creator input without overburdening staff, the AIA Digital Repository program at the American Institute of Architects will employ an alternate model:

Describe records before they arrive.

The setting
The AIA Digital Repository will preserve the AIA’s born digital intellectual capital and key operational records.

The AIA Archives holds the organization’s records, but it is not a collecting repository. Therefore AIA staff are both the records creators and the user community.

Describe first....
Programs and functional activities are consistent year after year. Their records can be anticipated by the archivist.

Front-end work for developing the repository involves meeting with each department to discuss and agree upon programs, records series, and some administrative metadata.

...then just add records
The repository will be structured around programs, not the departments which produce records – programs have continuity, departments are prone to reorganization.

Record metadata includes:
Predefined - 
• Originating dept.
Supplied by system - 
• Unique ID
• File type
User added - 
• Program year
• Optional subject tags

Users drop records into “records series” collections

Outcomes for this stage
• Positive staff engagement
• Increased staff awareness of the importance of recordkeeping
• Institutions that cannot afford an on-site or hosted repository solution can still use this model to set up an interim holding space on internal servers

Future directions
We are currently exploring development of an end-user accrual contribution tool that will be simple for staff members, and can be added on top of a repository system.

The AIA has been the leading professional membership association for architects since 1857. The AIA is a 2015 host institute for the National Digital Stewardship Residency (NDSR) program sponsored by Library of Congress and IMLS.

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